

U.S. Department
of Transportation
**United States
Coast Guard**



Commandant
United States Coast Guard

DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

U. S. COAST GUARD

STATEMENT OF VICE ADMIRAL CLYDE E. ROBBINS

FEDERAL ON-SCENE COMMANDER, VALDEZ, ALASKA

ON EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL CLEANUP ACTIVITIES

UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SUBCOMMITTEE ON COAST GUARD AND NAVIGATION

COMMITTEE ON MERCHANT MARINE AND FISHERIES

CORDOVA, ALASKA

10 AUGUST 1989

VICE ADMIRAL CLYDE E. ROBBINS



COMMANDER, COAST GUARD, PACIFIC AREA
AND COMMANDER, U.S. MARITIME
DEFENSE ZONE PACIFIC



BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Vice Admiral Clyde E. Robbins became Commander, Coast Guard Pacific Area on June 3, 1988. He was selected for that position while serving as Chief, Office of Operations at U.S. Coast Guard Headquarters in Washington, D.C. As commander of the Coast Guard's Pacific Area, he has operational authority over four Coast Guard districts which encompass the entire Pacific Basin. Vice Admiral Robbins is also Commander, U.S. Maritime Defense Zone Pacific, also known as Task Force 16, under Commander in Chief, U.S. Pacific Fleet. In this capacity, Vice Admiral Robbins leads a Navy command which is responsible for the coastal defense of the U.S. in the Pacific, including Alaska and the Hawaiian Archipelago. Both Navy and Coast Guard regular and reserve forces are assigned to that organization. As the Secretary of Transportation's Emergency Transportation Coordinator for Federal Region IX (Arizona, Nevada, California, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, Pacific Islands, and U.S. Trust Territories), he is also responsible for coordinating Federal transportation activities during peace and wartime emergencies.

A 1954 U.S. Coast Guard Academy graduate, Vice Admiral Robbins is a distinguished graduate of the National War College in Washington, D.C. His awards include the Distinguished Service Medal, two Legion of Merit Medals, the Meritorious Service Medal, the Air Medal, several Coast Guard Commendation Medals, and the Secretary's Award for Outstanding Achievement in Equal Opportunity.

A native of Columbia Cross Roads, Pa., Vice Admiral Robbins is married to the former Elizabeth P. Byrem of Troy, Pa. They have two children: Jennifer, living in Philadelphia and James, a Coast Guard pilot assigned to Air Station Clearwater, Fla.



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GOOD MORNING, MR. CHAIRMAN. I AM PLEASED TO REPRESENT THE COMMANDANT AND APPEAR BEFORE YOU TODAY. I HAVE WITH ME CAPTAIN CROWE, MY CHIEF OF OPERATIONS, AND CAPTAIN ZAWADSKI, MY CHIEF OF STAFF.

AS YOU KNOW, I AM CURRENTLY ASSIGNED AS THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR FOR THE VALDEZ CLEANUP OPERATION UNDER THE PROVISIONS OF THE CLEAN WATER ACT, THE NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN, AND A MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT WITH THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY.

WHEN THE EXXON VALDEZ RAN AGROUND AT BLIGH REEF IN THE EARLY MORNING HOURS OF GOOD FRIDAY, MARCH 24, 1989, IT MADE HISTORY. WITHIN A FEW HOURS, IT SPILLED MORE PETROLEUM PRODUCT THAN ANY OTHER SPILL IN THE UNITED STATES, IN AN AREA KNOWN FOR ITS PRISTINE ENVIRONMENT. OVER 250,000 BARRELS OF PRUDHOE BAY CRUDE ENTERED PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND. EFFORTS TO CORRAL THAT SPILL WERE MOSTLY UNSUCCESSFUL, AND WHILE THE FIGURES ARE STILL BEING COMPUTED, I SUSPECT THAT LESS THAN 10 PERCENT OF THAT AMOUNT WAS REMOVED FROM THE WATER'S SURFACE BEFORE IT REACHED THE SHORELINE.

NATURALLY, INVESTIGATIONS AND HEARINGS ON THE ACCIDENT STARTED IMMEDIATELY, AND THE RESULTS WILL EVENTUALLY BE PUBLISHED. TODAY, I WILL LIMIT MY REMARKS TO THE CLEANUP PHASE.

BECAUSE OF THE MAGNITUDE OF THE SPILL AND THE CONCERN FOR THE ENVIRONMENT, INTEREST IN THIS SPILL PERMEATED THE HIGHEST LEVELS OF GOVERNMENT. SECRETARY OF TRANSPORTATION SAMUEL SKINNER; THE COMMANDANT, ADMIRAL PAUL YOST; AND THE ADMINISTRATOR OF THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY, WILLIAM REILLY; WERE DISPATCHED BY THE PRESIDENT TO VIEW THE SPILL AND PREPARE A REPORT TO HIM. THAT REPORT WAS SUBMITTED IN MAY.

SHORTLY AFTER THIS VISIT, THE COMMANDANT DIRECTED ME TO COME TO ALASKA TO OVERSEE THE SPILL CLEANUP AS THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR. I ARRIVED ON 9 APRIL AND RELIEVED REAR ADMIRAL NELSON A WEEK LATER. EXCEPT FOR TWO SHORT ABSENCES, I HAVE BEEN HERE SINCE.

BEFORE I ARRIVED ON SCENE, HOWEVER, REAR ADMIRAL NELSON HAD ASKED EXXON FOR A CLEANUP PLAN BY 15 APRIL. THAT PLAN WAS PROVIDED, AND ALTHOUGH IT WAS SOMEWHAT LESS THAN THE COAST GUARD FELT WAS NECESSARY, IT WAS A BEGINNING. TWO MORE ITERATIONS OF THAT PLAN WERE PUBLISHED, ONE ON 1 MAY AND ONE ON 24 MAY. THE LATTER WAS ACCEPTED BY ME WITH SOME RESERVATIONS. I WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE EXXON PLANNED TO USE BOTH WITHIN PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND AND IN WESTERN ALASKA. BECAUSE THE SIZE OF THE CLEANUP WAS STILL DEVELOPING, AND MOBILIZING EQUIPMENT WAS THE PLAN'S CRITICAL ELEMENT, I FELT WE COULD MONITOR THE PROGRESS. IF THE CLEANUP APPEARED TO BE MOVING TOO SLOWLY, EXXON WOULD HAVE TO INCREASE THE SIZE OF ITS FORCE.

EXXON'S PLAN WAS ONLY THE BEGINNING. AS THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR, I AM REQUIRED TO "CONSULT" WITH THE STATE AS I MAKE DECISIONS. WHILE THAT IS NORMALLY DONE THROUGH THE STATE ON-SCENE COORDINATOR, THERE ARE NUMEROUS AGENCIES (BOTH FEDERAL AND STATE), AND INTEREST GROUPS SUCH AS LAND OWNERS, WHO NEED TO HAVE A PART IN THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

TO ENSURE THAT THESE PARTIES WERE IN ON THE CONSULTATIONS, WE FORMED AN INTERAGENCY SHORELINE CLEANUP COMMITTEE (ISCC). THIS COMMITTEE INCLUDED MEMBERSHIP OF ALL INTERESTED PARTIES AND FACILITATED AN ORGANIZED INPUT TO BOTH THE STATE AND FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATORS. ANOTHER COMMITTEE WAS FORMED TO HANDLE RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D) MATTERS. DURING THE EARLY PHASES, THERE WERE OTHER COMMITTEES IN VALDEZ; WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE R&D AND THE ISCC, ALL HAVE BEEN DISCONTINUED OR AMALGAMATED INTO THE ISCC. AD HOC COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN ESTABLISHED FOR SPECIAL PROJECTS AS THE NEED HAS ARISEN.

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND IS ONLY ONE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA AFFECTED BY THE SPILL. OTHER AREAS OF ALASKA NEEDED ATTENTION AS THE OIL SLICK MOVED SOUTHWEST. BECAUSE OF THE DISTANCES INVOLVED, AND BECAUSE WE WANTED LOCAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE CLEANUP, WE DIVIDED THE SPILL AREA INTO FOUR SECTORS: PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND, SEWARD, HOMER, AND KODIAK. WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE R&D COMMITTEE, COMMITTEES WHICH SERVED THE SAME FUNCTION AS THE PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND ISCC WERE FORMED IN THE OTHER THREE SECTORS. EXXON, THE COAST GUARD, THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, AND OTHER AGENCIES ASSIGNED PEOPLE TO OUTLYING SECTORS, BUT THE HEADQUARTERS FOR THE OVERALL OPERATION REMAINS AT VALDEZ.

THESE COMMITTEES HAVE WORKED WELL. THEY SERVE SEVERAL PURPOSES BEYOND ASSURING INPUT FROM ALL INTERESTED GROUPS. WITH THE LARGE NUMBER OF BEACHES AFFECTED BY OIL, MANY OF WHICH WERE UNIQUE, WE NEEDED A SYSTEM FOR CLEARLY DEFINING HOW EACH BEACH WAS TO BE CLEANED TO AVOID FURTHER ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE. THESE COMMITTEES PERFORMED THAT FUNCTION. THEY ALSO ENCOURAGED THE SURFACING OF ISSUES BEFORE EXXON GOT TO THE OPERATIONAL CLEANUP PHASE, THEREBY MINIMIZING LAST-MINUTE DELAYS. FINALLY, THE ISCC AND THE R&D COMMITTEE ACTIVELY SOUGHT NEW AND BETTER WAYS TO CLEAN UP THE SPILL.

THESE ADVISORY COMMITTEES HAVE BEEN AN ESSENTIAL ELEMENT IN THE CLEANUP ACTIVITY. THE ISCC IN VALDEZ DRAFTED, AND I PUBLISHED, A CLEANUP MANUAL WHICH HAS BEEN EXTREMELY HELPFUL IN FORMULATING OUR ACTIONS. IT IS A LIVING DOCUMENT WHICH CAN BE CHANGED AS WE LEARN.

THE CLEANUP IS SLOW AT BEST, BUT IT IS NOT FOR THE LACK OF TRYING. EXXON HAS PUT A MONUMENTAL EFFORT INTO CLEANING UP THE SPILL, EMPLOYING OVER 10,000 PEOPLE, OVER 1,000 BOATS AND SHIPS, AND OVER 60 AIRCRAFT. IN MY OPINION, THEY ARE TRYING HARD. THE DIFFICULTY OF THE TASK, HOWEVER, IS BEYOND IMAGINATION. THE OIL IS TENACIOUS. IT STICKS TO EVERYTHING IT TOUCHES. BREAKING IT FREE SO THAT IT CAN BE COLLECTED IS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE. WHEN COLD-WATER WASHING WAS INEFFECTIVE, THEY TURNED TO HOT WATER, USING HUGE FLUSHING SYSTEMS SUPPORTED BY BARGES. WHEN THE WATER IS HOT, AND WHEN SUPPORTED BY HAND WANDS AND HIGH-PRESSURE WATER FROM HAND HOSES, IT LOOSENS SOME OF THE OIL, BUT IT ALSO WASHES OIL DEEPER DOWN INTO THE SUBSTRATE. IN ADDITION, THERE IS SOME

CONCERN THAT THE HEAVY WASHING IS ALSO MOVING THE SEDIMENTS TO BELOW THE TIDE LEVEL, POSSIBLY ADDING MORE TO THE ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE DONE BY THIS SPILL. DESPITE REPEATED WASHES, BLACK BEACHES REMAIN, WITH OIL DEEP BENEATH THE SURFACE. SUBSEQUENT TIDES LIFT ADDITIONAL OIL TO THE SURFACE WHICH RE-OILS THE TREATED BEACHES. WE FOUND THAT WE COULD WASH AN INDIVIDUAL BEACH FOR MANY DAYS AND STILL NOT REMOVE ALL THE OIL.

OTHER METHODS HAVE BEEN, AND ARE BEING, TESTED. INSERTION OF WARM WATER BENEATH THE SURFACE AT THE HIGH POINTS OF THE BEACH AREA HAS SUCCESSFULLY FLOATED OUT SOME OF THE OIL FROM BELOW THE SURFACE, BUT IT WAS EFFECTIVE IN A VERY SMALL AREA. CONSIDERING THE MILES OF BEACH THAT MUST BE CLEANED, THIS METHOD IS NOT EFFICIENT.

ONE PARTICULARLY EFFECTIVE PIECE OF EQUIPMENT IS THE "OMNI BOOM." IT IS A DEVICE ADAPTED FROM A STREET WASHER THAT PROVIDES HOT WATER FROM NUMEROUS NOZZLES AT HIGH PRESSURE. THE NOZZLES ARE AT THE END OF A BOOM WHICH AN OPERATOR CAN MOVE ALONG THE ROCKS AND CREVASSES ON THE SHORELINE. IT IS VERY EFFECTIVE IN AREAS WHERE A BARGE CAN GET CLOSE ENOUGH TO THE SHORE, BUT IT, TOO CAN DAMAGE THE ENVIRONMENT BY WASHING AWAY SEDIMENTS.

OF COURSE, HAND REMOVAL OF SOILED MATERIAL IS USED VERY EFFECTIVELY IN MANY AREAS WHERE OILING IS LIGHT OR MODERATE. IT HAS BEEN THE PRIMARY METHOD USED IN THE WESTERN SECTORS AND IS PROBABLY THE LEAST DAMAGING TO THE ENVIRONMENT. HOWEVER, IT IS OF LIMITED BENEFIT ON SHORELINES COVERED WITH LARGE ROCKS AND BOULDERS.

HAND WIPING ROCKS WITH SORBANT MATERIALS IS SELDOM EFFECTIVE. IT'S DONE WHEN THERE IS NO OTHER CHOICE AND WHERE LARGE DEPOSITS OF OIL REMAIN. MOSTLY IT IS FRUSTRATING AND NONPRODUCTIVE.

TWO OTHER DEVELOPMENTS ARE UNDER CONSIDERATION: CLEANING AGENTS AND BIOREMEDIATION. HOT WATER WASHING, AS I HAVE SAID, IS NOT HIGHLY EFFECTIVE. COMPARABLE TO WASHING ONE'S HANDS WITHOUT SOAP, NOT TOO MUCH CAN BE EXPECTED AGAINST VERY HEAVILY OILED SURFACES. A GOOD CLEANING AGENT USED WITH HOT WATER COULD BE VERY HELPFUL PROVIDED IT IS NOT TOXIC. EXPERIMENTS WITH SEVERAL CLEANING AGENTS HAVE BEEN TIME-CONSUMING AND THE RESULTS UNIMPRESSIVE. NO ONE WISHES TO DO FURTHER DAMAGE TO THE ENVIRONMENT, AND MANY ARE RELUCTANT TO TRY ANY CHEMICALS AT ALL. COMPLICATED TESTS, ASSAYS, AND OTHER PROCEDURES HAVE MADE PROGRESS EXCRUCIATINGLY SLOW. RECENTLY, HOWEVER, EXXON HAS TESTED A PRODUCT CALLED COREXIT 9580M2 WHICH SHOWS SOME PROMISE. IF IT CONTINUES TO PROVE TO BE NON-TOXIC AND IS EFFECTIVE, IT COULD GREATLY ENHANCE THE CLEANUP.

BIOREMEDIATION USES THE CONCEPT OF ENCOURAGING EXISTING BACTERIA TO EAT THE OIL. THIS IS DONE THROUGH THE ADDITION OF NITROGEN AND PHOSPHORUS. NUTRIENTS INCREASE THE NATURAL MICROBES AND, PROVIDED THERE IS ADEQUATE OXYGEN AVAILABLE, THE OIL WILL BE EATEN AWAY, LEAVING RELATIVELY CLEAN BEACHES. THIS PROCEDURE WILL NOT BE EFFECTIVE ON HEAVY CONCENTRATIONS OF ASPHALT AND MOUSSE, BUT THE INITIAL TEST SHOWS AMAZING RESULTS. ON ONE SECTION OF A COBBLE STONE BEACH, STONES WERE FREE OF OIL STAINS IN 10 DAYS.

THERE IS SOME CONCERN ABOUT USING THIS METHOD WHERE THERE IS LOW TIDAL ENERGY BECAUSE OF ALGAE BLOOM, BUT I AM OF THE OPINION THAT SUCH AN OCCURRENCE WILL BE SHORT-LIVED AND OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE.

DESPITE THESE LATEST DEVELOPMENTS, NO ONE SHOULD EXPECT A RETURN OF THE SHORELINES TO THEIR ORIGINAL CONDITION. ROCKS WILL BE STAINED FOR YEARS, AND THERE WILL BE RESIDUE REMAINING IN SOME PLACES FOR DECADES.

THIS BRINGS ME TO THE DISCUSSION OF "HOW CLEAN IS CLEAN." OIL ON THE SHORELINE POSES SEVERAL ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS. IN ADDITION TO BEING UNSIGHTLY, IT IS HAZARDOUS TO WILDLIFE. IT ALSO ENDANGERS OTHER AREAS. UNLESS THE GROSS AMOUNTS ARE REMOVED, THE OIL CAN BECOME WATERBORNE AGAIN AND POLLUTE OTHER SHORELINES. THE NUMBER-ONE PRIORITY IN THIS CLEANUP, THEREFORE, IS TO REMOVE THE GROSS AMOUNTS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FROM HEAVILY OILED SHORELINES. IN THE MEANTIME, CLEANING LIGHTLY AND MODERATELY OILED SHORELINES, PARTICULARLY IN THE SEWARD, HOMER, AND KODIAK SECTORS, USING LESS INTRUSIVE METHODS, PROCEEDED CONCURRENTLY. THE OBJECTIVE WAS TO HAVE ALL THE BEACHLINE TREATED BY THE MIDDLE OF SEPTEMBER. WHETHER A TREATED SHORELINE WILL NEED FURTHER TREATMENT DEPENDS ON NUMEROUS FACTORS. IN SOME CASES, IT WILL BE RE-OILED, AS DESCRIBED EARLIER, AND RETREATMENT WILL PROBABLY BE NECESSARY.

IT IS POSSIBLE THAT RE-OILED SHORELINE CAN BE BIOREMEDIATED EFFECTIVELY, AND IT IS POSSIBLE THAT NO FURTHER ACTION WOULD BE NECESSARY. THIS IS NOT TO SAY, HOWEVER, THAT A BIOREMEDIATED SHORELINE WILL NOT REQUIRE FURTHER TREATMENT. I ANTICIPATE

ALMOST ALL OF THE SHORELINE WILL REQUIRE REEVALUATION NEXT SPRING, AND THAT A DECISION WILL HAVE TO BE MADE AT THAT TIME AS TO WHAT FURTHER TREATMENT WILL BE UNDERTAKEN.

THIS GIVES A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE CLEANUP OPERATIONS. IT IS MY EXPECTATION THAT MOST, IF NOT ALL, SHORELINE WILL BE TREATED BY THE END OF SEPTEMBER OR BY WHATEVER DATE DEMOBILIZATION IS COMPLETED. THE SHORELINE WILL NOT BE CLEAN, BUT IF WE ARE SUCCESSFUL, IT WILL BE STABILIZED. DURING THE WINTER THERE WILL BE SOME MIGRATION OF OIL, BUT MUCH OF THAT WILL BE DISPERSED AND DISAPPEAR. BECAUSE OF WEATHERING, SOME SHORELINE WILL BE COVERED BY ASPHALT-LIKE MATERIAL. WHAT IS DONE NEXT YEAR WILL DEPEND ON MANY FACTORS, BUT THE DECISION WILL BE MADE BY THE COAST GUARD, IN CONSULTATION WITH THE STATE OF ALASKA. I DO NOT EXPECT THE TYPE OF WASHING THAT EXXON IS DOING THIS YEAR WILL BE EFFECTIVE NEXT YEAR. REMOVAL OF ASPHALT-LIKE MATERIAL WILL PROBABLY BE NECESSARY IN SOME PLACES, AND POSSIBLY ADDITIONAL BIOREMEDIATION MAY BE EFFECTIVE. HOW MUCH OF AN EFFORT, AND WHAT KIND, IS IMPOSSIBLE TO ESTIMATE AT THIS TIME.

AS FOR WINTERTIME OPERATIONS, THEY WILL BE MINIMAL. IT IS MY INTENTION, AND I'M ASSURED BY BOTH EXXON AND THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION, THAT REGULAR OVERFLIGHT SURVEYS WILL BE MADE OF ALL AFFECTED AREAS. IF SENSITIVE AREAS SUCH AS HATCHERIES ARE THREATENED BY MOVING OIL, ACTION WILL BE TAKEN TO PROTECT THEM, IF FEASIBLE. I EXPECT EXXON TO DO THAT, BUT IF THEY DON'T, I WILL BE PREPARED TO DO IT UNDER THE 311(K) FUND AND WILL SEND EXXON THE BILL. I'VE BEEN ASSURED BY EXXON, HOWEVER, THAT THEY WILL RESPOND AS NEEDED.

THIS LEADS ME TO THE SUBJECT OF THE FEDERAL ON-SCENE COORDINATOR'S AUTHORITY. UNDER THE NATIONAL CONTINGENCY PLAN, I AM OBLIGATED TO MAKE A REASONABLE EFFORT TO HAVE THE DISCHARGER VOLUNTARILY AND PROMPTLY REMOVE THE OIL. I CAN TAKE APPROPRIATE RESPONSE ACTIONS ONLY AFTER DETERMINING THAT THE RESPONSIBLE PARTY IS UNKNOWN OR IS NOT TAKING PROPER ACTIONS. WITH APPROXIMATELY \$6 MILLION IN THE 311(K) FUND, IT WOULD HAVE BEEN DIFFICULT, IF NOT IMPOSSIBLE, FOR ME TO HAVE DONE AS WELL AS EXXON HAS IF I HAD FEDERALIZED THIS SPILL. EXXON HAS RESPONDED POSITIVELY TO MY REQUESTS, WE HAVE COMPROMISED WHEN COMPROMISES HAVE BEEN APPROPRIATE, AND CONSIDERING THE ENORMOUS TASK, I GIVE THEM OVERALL GOOD MARKS. I HAVEN'T FELT A GREAT NEED FOR MORE AUTHORITY OVER EXXON. THE TASK WOULD BE EASIER IF I HAD MORE, BUT THE PRESENT ORGANIZATION IS WORKING.

NOW A WORD ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH ALASKA. IT HAS BEEN STRAINED AT TIMES, BUT IN GENERAL IT IS SATISFACTORY. I'VE HELD DISCUSSIONS WITH THE GOVERNOR AND WITH THE DEPARTMENT CHARGED WITH THE STATE COORDINATION, THE ALASKA DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION. WHERE WE'VE HAD DIFFICULTIES, WE'VE BEEN ABLE TO IRON THEM OUT. MOST OF THESE INVOLVED STATE REQUIREMENTS FOR WASTE DISPOSAL, LAND PERMITS, USE OF CLEANING AGENTS, AND SUCH.

MR. CHAIRMAN, THIS CONCLUDES MY STATEMENT. I WILL BE GLAD TO ANSWER ANY QUESTIONS YOU OR THE OTHER MEMBERS OF THE SUBCOMMITTEE MAY HAVE.